

Access approved. Wstęp dozwolony.

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Refugee issues in Poland

It is important to consider the current situation in Poland before tackling the problems around refugees. Poland had a net migration of -38 090 people between 2010 and 2014¹. Poland is also often considered to be highly homogenous, but it is worth noting that 1.8% of the population was born outside of the country². There are also about 100 applications a day for asylum in Poland³. These asylum seekers come principally from the Ukraine, Russia, Georgia, Vietnam, Belarus, Syria, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and African countries⁴. However there were only 732 people granted refugee status in Poland in 2014.⁵

Recent research⁶ implies that there is a significant shift in attitudes in Poland towards refugees. While the acceptance level of the refugees has been high and steady for over 10 years (at 76% in 2015), the amount of people supporting permanent resettlement has fallen down (from 27% in 2004 to 22% in 2015). There has been a simultaneous increase in those who agree with the need for temporary ad-hoc help (48% to 54%). Poles are also more open to citizens of neighboring countries looking for asylum, with 46% declaring that they would agree to take in Ukrainians from the regions fighting with pro-Russian separatists. The numbers concerning the Middle East and Africa region are much lower: 53% are against granting shelter to refugees from these regions. This data points to the root of refugee discrimination: viewing them as an ‘other’ group. This is clear as attitudes towards refugees from countries with demographics more like Poland’s (Ukraine) are more accepting than those towards refugees from Africa and the Middle East.

The issue of refugees in Poland is enormous for displaced people seeking to make a home here. The situation can be especially challenging in a country as homogenous as Poland, where so far refugees constitute only ca. 0.04% of population. As such, refugees are a minority group which is often misunderstood. They are sometimes confused with economic migrants or others coming to find work in Poland. This is to be expected as the number of refugees in Poland is small, 16 438 as of December 2014⁷. Compared to the population of Poland, about 38 million, refugees may seem nearly invisible. They certainly seem to be an ‘other’ group. That is, the status and lives of refugees are often not seen as relatable to Poles at large. The result of this, combined with systemic and legal barriers, makes integration of refugees in Poland particularly difficult.

¹ [Worldbank data](#), 2015

² Polish Migration Forum (presentation for HIA)

³ Polish Migration Forum (presentation for HIA)

⁴ Polish Migration Forum (presentation for HIA)

⁵ Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej (presentation for HIA)

⁶ CBOS, 2015, “*Polacy wobec problemu uchodźstwa*”, [press release](#)

⁷ UNHCR, 2015 UNHCR subregional operations profile - Northern, Western, Central and Southern Europe

Refugees usually are kept in detention centers after arriving to Poland, which often feature deplorable living conditions: “Everywhere you saw only walls, everywhere the guards were with us, and they treated us like animals,” Naeimi recounts, adding that while at Lesznowola she was the victim of verbal sexual harassment and of an overall abusive attitude on the part of the staff⁸. These detention centers, although not the exact focus of our campaign, are reflective of the way refugees are often viewed by society. Even for those who end up receiving refugee status, their problems are nowhere near over.

Those who receive refugee status in Poland are supported for one year with 1 175 złotys a month and housing. They are expected to integrate during this year, form connections, learn Polish, etc. This is of course not reasonably possible for refugees to accomplish, and many find themselves in difficult situations after the year ends. One particularly common struggle is that of finding and affording housing. A recent pilot study by the Institute of Public Affairs suggests that around one third of refugees granted asylums in Poland are homeless⁹. “The greatest risk of homelessness appears when the integration program ends,” said Kinga Wysieńska, co-author of the study which concluded that the integration program does not fulfill its function. “In the space of one-year, refugees are not able to learn Polish or acquire professional and socio-cultural competencies necessary to undertake work and function independently in the society,” said Wysieńska. This is largely due to lack of sufficient incomes as well as housing discrimination. The housing problems faced by refugees therefore are closely connected to problems finding work. This is probably largely due to difficulties learning Polish and establishing connections in only one year, and discrimination in hiring.

Social media campaign

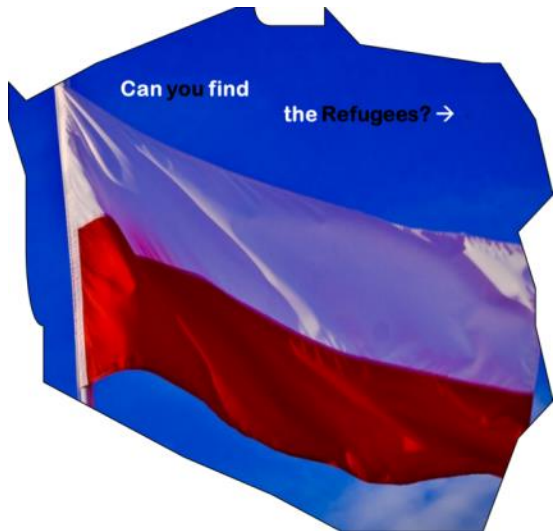
From our research on internet forums and reading public discourse, we believed that the main root of discrimination against refugees in Poland is them being viewed as an ‘other’ group who take up space and money, and do not contribute to society. As such, we chose to create a campaign combatting these notions by humanizing refugees while countering misconceptions. We sought to target an audience aged 18 to 24, particularly those in university. This was also the simplest group for us to target because of our connections. We called the campaign “Access Approved” in order to make the social acceptance of refugees feel more definite and physical. We created a Facebook page, the use of which was our main focus. We also created a Twitter page, however this was an effort not fully pursued. As of August 11, 2015 the Facebook page has been liked by 213 people. The Twitter page has 9 followers.

We created one movie in which we asked people what they were planning to do that night. We cut together their lighthearted responses in the video. We then asked them what they would do if they had to leave the country that night, and used these answers to juxtapose those to the first question. The goal was to help people see how extreme it is to be forced from one’s home.

We initially released one image in order to have some practice with image editing and the social media platforms. It was aimed at pointing out the ridiculousness of the notion that refugees take up too much space and had the caption “Can .0427% of the population take up too much space?” The image was liked twice and reached 252 people on Facebook and reached 18 potential people on Twitter. It can be seen here:

⁸ Human Wrongs Watch, *Being a Refugee in Poland*, 2012 (<http://human-wrongs-watch.net/2012/12/14/18349/>)

⁹ Magda Qandil, *A third of refugees in Poland may be homeless*, 2012 (<http://www.unhcr.org/4f426c279.html>)

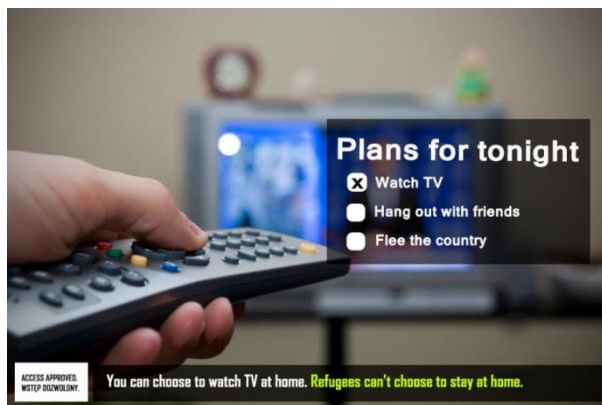


The first full series of images we created took the form of to-do lists and multiple choice questions. These targeted the misconceptions that refugees choose to come to Poland, that they come simply for economic reasons, and that they do not add to Polish culture. The images were as follows:

The 'Plans' graphics



The 'Misconceptions' graphics





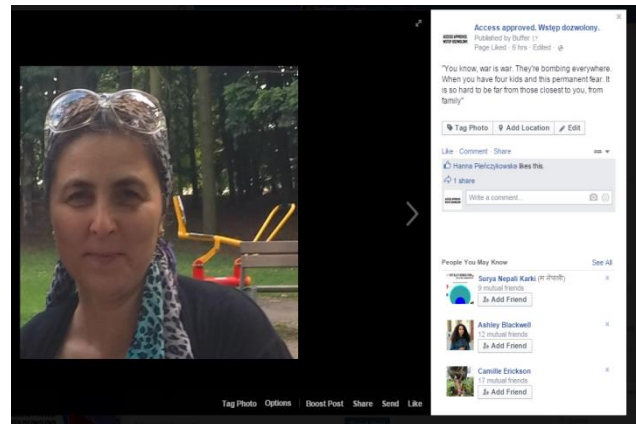
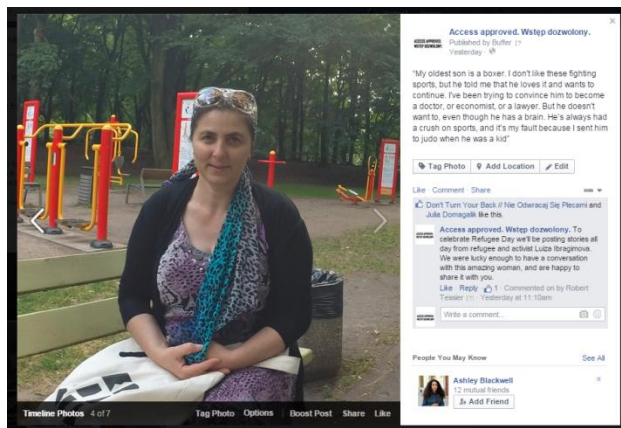
As of August 9, 2015 this set of images reached 2 532 people on Facebook.

Moreover, we were also able to interview Luiza Ibragimova, a refugee. We sought to create content from the interview that would help to humanize refugees. As such we created images paired with captions containing quotes from the interview.

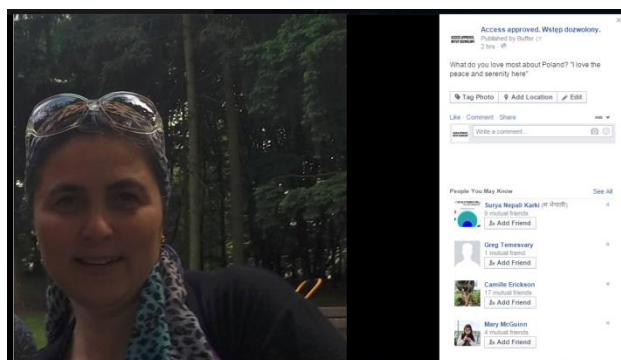
“- What do you like about Poland?
- Peace, serenity”

“You know, war is war. They're bombing everywhere.
When you have four kids... and this permanent fear”.

We released most of these on Jun 21st to mark International Refugee Day. They can be seen below:



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¹⁰ All images, quotes and videos are available on our [fanpage](#)

The images have so far reached 1 683 people on Facebook as of August 9, 2015. We also made two videos out of the interview, the first of which had already been posted and 262 times of Facebook, reaching 928 people in the first three days by June 23, 2015.

The last set of images, is made to shock people and get their attention. They are based off a similar theme of humanizing refugees and making their social exclusion feel physical and personal. The first image in the series is here:



Our campaign was inspired by numerous other human rights education campaigns. One in particular was done by Amnesty International, and did a good job forcing people to recognize issues and confront them in a very personal manner. The campaign involved displaying clear glass signs that created the illusion of people in terrible situations being present right in an urban setting. They included the caption: "It's not happening here. But it's happening now". The signs were very powerful, moving, and personal in a way that we hoped our campaign would be. They were also slightly controversial and uncomfortable, which got more people to talk about them and increased awareness.

The Access Approved Facebook page has 315 likes and the Twitter page has 9 followers as of August 9, 2015. The Facebook page has engaged 334 people and our posts have reached 6 269 people. This is a relatively low number of likes; however the engagement relative to likes is high. This tells us that our content is good and people like it, however it has not been spread enough. This is most likely due to time constraints, as we have only been working for about 10 days. We also contacted many NGO's and news groups with press releases, but none of them shared the page. It is also possible that the page name was not catchy enough. The problems were especially exacerbated by our lack of connections in Polish civil society and particularly in refugee groups. Overall, increasing our outreach has been more difficult than we anticipated.

We have received only some input from strangers about our Facebook page; however the feedback we have received has been almost entirely positive. They responded especially well to us sharing the stories of refugees. We received only one negative comment, which was politically based and was someone's opinion that we should also post about Poland not being ready to accept refugees.

We found that we had to be careful when first starting out with our campaign to walk the line between offensive and boring when outlining our messages. There were a few ideas that we had but didn't use because they were offensive, and also some ideas which were not interesting enough. This was especially hard because we did not know much about the topic of refugees in Poland when starting our campaign, and so were unsure what kind of content would be appropriate. We did some research, but ended up needing to do more during our campaign. This is related to time constraints and us being too quick to put out our campaign without having done enough background work. Finally, we felt very limited by focusing on a social media campaign. This allowed us to do only outreach work and limited the demographic we could reach. With more time and funds we would have definitely liked to create physical advertisements and educational materials in public spaces.

We have several points of advice for our peers working on social campaigns. First, do not underestimate the amount of time you will need to spend working before putting out your campaign. You should allow yourself ample time to do substantial research about your topic. You should also take the time and effort to build connections with individuals and organizations working on the same issues. It might be more beneficial to partner with one or more of them. It is also important to really work out exactly what you want to say and make your message as pointed and specific as possible, with a clear goal for what you want your target group to do after hearing your message. This means that you will need to have a very specific topic and goal rather than being general.

Follow-up of the campaign

This campaign can be adapted to create a long term effort. So far, Karolina and Sasha have taken up the challenge of updating the fan page as frequently as possible, usually spreading the word about refugees through shared posts, webpages, and articles found online. Nevertheless, it is clearly visible that these tools are too limited and do not catch the attention of those who are yet undecided about the issues of refugees. The page needs an injection of more personal and thought-provoking posts. One way this would be possible would be to turn it into a platform for refugees to tell their stories, as this portion of our content received positive feedback. Happily, we may count on support from Facebook users who like our page. For example, lately we received a message with a proposition to share an iconographic on the Mediterranean crisis. It was relevant and we posted it on "Access Approved" page.

As for the future we are hoping to make our work more meaningful and filled with own content (visuals, videos, quotes) once it is more feasible given the current time constraints.

Bibliography

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6. CBOS, 2015, "*Polacy wobec problemu uchodźstwa*", press release

7. UNHCR, 2015 *UNHCR subregional operations profile - Northern, Western, Central and Southern Europe*
8. Human Wrongs Watch, *Being a Refugee in Poland*, 2012 (<http://human-wrongs-watch.net/2012/12/14/18349/>)
9. Magda Qandil, *A third of refugees in Poland may be homeless*, 2012 (<http://www.unhcr.org/4f426c279.html>)